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## The self-concept of students – formation and its changes

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### Abstract

The article deals with the formation of self-concept of an individual and its changes in the context of Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor. It focused on the impact of self-discrepancy theory, theory of self-guides and deficits in basic developmental needs on personal life of the individual, interpersonal relationships and studying. Currently we meet students who are relatively successful, objectively have good study results but subjectively perceive anxiety, can hardly prepare for exams, do not have trust in themselves, they evaluate themselves rather negatively, they have a low self-esteem and self-confidence. They tend to have problems in interpersonally relationships, mainly in partnerships. In the process of the therapy there are topics which occur from the personal history that are linked with satisfaction of basic developmental needs by parenting persons, towards the life standards (self-guides), which had been passed on by significant others. We find the deficits in satisfaction of basic developmental needs and its after-effects, discrepancy in self-concept. Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor offers to enter into scenic-symbolic space and perceive on a symbolic level adequate interaction with parental persons which brings alternative memory and becomes a part of the individual's memory and therefore positively influences its self-concept.

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## 1. Theoretical background

We can understand the self-concept as perception of oneself formed through the experience with the environment and influenced mainly by the environment and the significant others. (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton in Blatný & Plháková, 2003) Balcar (1991) claims that through self-concept we create a picture of ourselves, that is important, sometimes appropriate, and sometimes faraway. The topic self-concept, self-acceptance is also described by Ulrichová (2013). He adds that the picture of Me –(Self) is created and developed in interaction of the individual and the world based on experience. The usage of social networks is nowadays in indirect influence on the formation of self-concept – 97 % of adolescents use the social networks. (Homolková & Taliánová, 2012) Shares components of personal meaning of self-concept by Řičan (1975) and adds: image („I am“); evaluation („I should be“); direction („I want to be“); potency („I may do“); a role („I should do“). (Balcar, 1991) At this point we recall Higgins' division of Self onto actual, ought and ideal. (Higgins, 1987) Actual Self represents all what the individual believes s/he possesses, ideal self-comprises from attributes what the individual would like to possess (hopes, aspirations, wishes...) and ought represents the attributes that the individual believes s/he should have (as for example responsibility, duties, tasks...). It is also necessary to specify that actual, ought and ideal Self can be divided by Higgins (1987) into an area Self and view perspective on Self – thus two dimensions – individual's own image of him/herself and an aspect of significant other. Higgins came up with a concept of self-guides – so called life standards, motives – ought and actual self. This is created during individual's development in the context with significant other. Discrepancy of partial areas of Self and perspectives Self is linked in coherence by following: Discrepancy between one's own actual self and personally formed ideal self – leads to the absence of positive judgements of oneself, depressive emotions and frustration. Discrepancy between one's own actual self and ideal self from the standpoint of a significant other person – provokes depressive emotions – e.g. despondency, shame; fear of the loss of love and respect of others. A discrepancy between one's own actual self and one's own formulation of ought self -results in negative judgements of oneself and susceptibility to states of agitation – feelings of guilt, constraint, self-contempt; feelings of moral insufficiency. Discrepancy between one's own actual self and ought self from the standpoint of a significant other - leads to states of agitation – e.g. anxiety, feelings of threat; fear of punishment. (Higgins, 1987; Blatný & Plháková, 2003).

When we look back to the statement above we must bring to mind in accordance with professionals that self-concept is formed and is significantly influenced by the nearest environment of the individual. There are especially entering into interaction of the individual and parenting person. Balcar (1991) states at this point that a child looks at itself in the context as he/she presumes how his/her parents see him/her. Also various subjective concepts and implicit theories penetrate into the process. (Havigerová, Haviger, & Truhlářová, 2013) At the same time there are interventions of social stereotypes – within the family, later on away from home. During our lifetime we create so called “personal map of the world“, that is by Řičan (1975) a picture of “Me in the world“. Human's behaviour is than influenced by what type of the map it is - in fact how clear the places of safety are indicated and where the individual has threats. Balcar speaks about the necessity to have strong and stable structures of self-concept, in order to fulfil a unifying role in interaction of an individual with the environment. (Balcar, 1991) Pesso, Boyden-Pesso, & Vrtbovská (2009) speak about a soul – true self (in a continuous process of self-realization), an ego (conscious part of Self, regulates the energy coming from the soul, by Pesso regards the self-concept so that it had been created by interactions with the outside world) and Self - identity (consciousness, subjective perception of organized person). If we have clear, internally coherent and a stable picture of the self and about the world, we perceive it as the certainty. The certainty often prevails over positive evaluation. Similarly Blatný (in Blatný & Plháková, 2003) emphasises, that individual is capable to accept negative information about them if it corresponds with their self-concept.

The reason is, inter alia, the fact that the change of the self-concept brings in any case a temporary loss of certainty in orientation, that can be accompanied by anxiety and the individual's effort to keep the existing – although negative – self-concept. (Balcar, 1991) The individual does not want to be in stress. According to Žumárová (2012) we consider stress as a negative emotional experience.

Balcar (1991) points out at the same time at the necessity of completion in harmony with the development of the individual and gradual development of the picture about self in accordance to changes which are perceived by experiences– these are completed by an incomplete picture or improve the incorrect one. This suggests for therapeutic approaches that work with symbolic level. For example the mentioned PBSP offers both work within an extrastructural dialogue (Sřínek, 2014) or furthermore scenic – symbolic space, where the use of ideal figures occurs in therapeutic sessions (structure) on symbolic level towards satisfying of developmental needs (by the right

relatives, at the right time and for a client subjectively right level) and therefore to complete or improve the picture of self or about the world. In the paragraph Findings we shall bring the results of the research results made together with the following application of PBSP at students, who showed after-effects of deficits in basic developmental needs and discrepancy in self-concept.

## 2. Research questions

Based on mentioned theoretical backgrounds and in accordance with the study objectives there had been set following research questions.

What is the influence of self-discrepancy, self-guides and deficits in basic needs on personal and study life?

What is the potential of PBSP to make changes of self-concept of students?

## 2. Purpose of the study

The objective of the study were to determine the extent of influence of self-discrepancy, self-guides and deficits in basic needs on personal and study life of an individual. The related aim was to describe which elements and principles of PBSP affect self-concept in a positive way.

## 3. Research methods

The qualitative research strategy was decided. Data were obtained using the casuistries. The respondent's stories were analysed using the narrative reconstruction. Narrative reconstruction accounts with followed topics: Life issues, Representation of actions, Plots, Values and beliefs, Reflexion and perspective, The images of oneself and the others (Čermák, 2002; Hendl, 2008; Chrz, 2004; Miovský, 2006).

## 4. Findings

Ten casuistries have been described and five selected of them (4 females and 1 male) are introduced in this paper. We analysed casuistries of students and examined the formation of self-concept and the influence of self-discrepancy and self-guides on their lives, including interpersonal relationships and study. An individual with self-discrepancy often lacks control over the events in his/her personal and study life. PBSP offers scenic-symbolic work with ideal figures which are bearers of opportunities to experience symbolic interaction which completes or improves an inaccurate picture in oneself.

### • Life issues

R1 – comes with anxiety, has a problem to speak in front of people, studies with good results, however subjectively does not feel well – has worries about how her colleagues and lectures would look at her and if they speak against her. Little by little we uncover a significant figure of the client's life story – her mother, who led her since a she was small towards maximal achievement and was criticized by her failures.

R2 – what brought her were initially the failures in relationships, they were actually overwhelming and negatively projected in managing her studies. Another issue was a protracted treatment of musculoskeletal injuries that prevented from sporting disciplines and forced her into distribution of the study year. Her mother emerged to be dominant, controlling and critical.

R3 – comes with problems with his girlfriend, to whom he feels to be fixed. Relation issues negatively influence the study. It gradually turns to be the family where he tends to be much disciplined, and not only during the study but also in relationships – the same he requires from his girlfriend.

R4 – describes partnership disagreements which she blames her. At the same time does not feel well during the study, always worries that the task will not be managed well, although it is not true seen on the result. A figure of her real mother appears who requires good results at school and obedience.

R5 – comes with anxiety and depressive symptomatic. Does not feel well, does not attend school very often and the study flags. Does not like the self-look. We uncover, inter alia, a parental figure of her father who is a hothead and she misses her place and support.

There are obvious discrepancies mainly between actual and ought self, from the standpoint of a significant other and later on from its own perspective. The influence of self-guides is confirmed created during the development in context with action of parental persons. There has been also a topic taking a shape of deficits in basic developmental needs.

- **Representation of actions**

R1 – firstly she tried to meet her mother's demands and to perform excellent school results. After that she decided to study far away in order to live in a dormitory. Her home returns are sporadic – communication with a father is without any problem, the mother tends to have more attention and support these days and if does not happen so she blames her daughter.

R2 – she took the blame at the beginning, that she was not a good partner. She felt stupid and she considered her now ex-partner as Mr Perfect, she understood that he would always evaluate her work and find mistakes. She was used to the criticisms and control of her actions from her mother.

R3 – he started to control his girlfriend and blame her for not giving him support when he had study problems and that she was not responsible. At the same time he wished to be like her – to be free and as he often mentioned: *"For himself"*.

R4 – she very often blamed her husband for not having had done something detail correct. She rushed to her small son when he was about to do something, she very often compared him with other kids. In her studies she was afraid of her performance and negative evaluation. She tried to meet the study needs however with considerable strain and anxiety.

R5 – the insufficiency in the need of place and support at her father was compensated by the confirmation of herself at her mother. She harmed herself when she did not get as exactly as she needed.

There are obvious discrepancy in self-concept that correspond with after effects of the deficits in satisfaction of basic developmental needs. While shown in the therapy it is often necessary to pay attention to so called preoperational phase, which takes place out of the structure and where is necessary to saturate the pilot – conscious parts – where it is necessary that the client understand well the relations of his/her story. Only then it is meaningful to start therapeutic sessions (structure).

- **Plots**

R1 – critical and together to a certain extent manipulative approach of a mother were the stepping stone to leave home. For the next plot can be considered the client's travelling abroad to study, where the mother was certain that her daughter would not manage because she was non-independent and the mother betrayed her from the journey.

R2 – experience with a critical, a controlling mother and with a critical partner was confirmed by the client that she did not deserve a good partner nor study well. With her nowadays partner has a relationship where she is supported, her partner is interested in her wishes, appreciates her altruism etc. The client has difficulties to deal with as she says: *"It is difficult to accept nice things when I do not know it, I often ask four times if it is really real. I tend to be the workhorse in the relations to deserve the partner even though I feel I do not have to."*

R3 – the scenario what "brought" the client from a family does not correspond with the scenario of his girlfriend. He bears heavily that his girlfriend repeats the year at school. He tends to lead her towards responsibility, at the same time he seeks and expects support – he does not get it and feels very uncertain that affects many spheres of his life.

R4 – orientation on performance from the client's mother's side (its explanation is a matter of course which does not have to be appreciated), demand towards the client to care about a sibling and often criticism have been assimilated as anxiety need to do "something" and perform in several spheres. Client's partner has brought a natural opposite to her life, he can relax, praise, and he appreciates his wife. The issue is that the client cannot accept that fact.

R5 – criticism from the father's side and distrust in her abilities bring a low level of self-confidence and uncertainty. There the client sometimes tends to manipulate in particular with mother. She escapes into illness; it has negative impact on the study.

We see a low ability to accept (positive) information about ourselves (primarily from life partners), if they are not in accordance with our (although negative) self-concept. In this phase the PBSP clients are resistant to accept ideal figures, from this reason it is necessary firstly work with so called reversals/bookmarks what was bad in the history of the individual.

- **Values and beliefs**

R1 – for the client communication abilities represent the value. She appreciates the ability of authentic communication which has not criticism. Another value is seen in abroad experience – it was a perception of ability to handle something big.

R2 – a partnership is seen as the value, where mutual support and space for both is present.

R3 – value represent mutual support and responsibility, or fulfilment of obligations and then common sharing of free time.

R4 – here at first was well done work as the value (in a household, in relationship...) and a good study performance.

R5 – Parents' support represents the value for the client. Whereas she hates herself, she does not want to ever get married or have children. She wants to live in a different country. She plans to move abroad.

As a general rule for the clients has the value what they had missed, possibly what internalized as life standards. We can notice a projection of an old map into the presence. Objectively there is tendency to know implicitly what is good. In this context there is a work potential with basic developmental need of place, safety, saturation, support and limits.

- **Reflexion and perspective**

R1 – has a feeling that she was not given enough support, but on the contrary has to give. She finds out that she gets on well with her father from the whole family.

R2 – she lacked appreciation, even though she showed a maximum performance. It is surprising that she was still willing to continue and to agree with the fact that was not good enough.

R3 – he was firmly rooted in the given scenario, another concept of a partnership and fulfilment of study obligations was out of the question. When he started looking at the scenario from a different angle he commented: *"How strange, I always knew from the home was right."*

R4 – has a feeling that she had to and wanted to (to deserve the praise) perform good results. Not always she was able to meet that in details.

R5 – she has a feeling that nobody understands her and she should deserve it.

At this point we would like to recall the work with pathogenic beliefs. In PBSP we speak about voices, that transmit the conviction, evaluation... They mainly come from parenting persons, from significant others. We put them into a context of life standards. If the client is mainly negatively evaluated, s/he often accepts it as a part of a picture about him/herself and it happens that positive evaluation is not heard or not accepted – in the therapy there is a problem at first to leave the rooted (and thus certain) scenario in the therapy, which brings somehow the certainty.

- **Pictures of self and others**

R1 – at the beginning she saw herself as uncertain, unauthorized to disagree with something in order not to hurt someone. Little by little she is surer of herself, aware of her study success and ability to break away from family and to live her own life according to her. She sees her mother as critical, performance oriented; however she does not let her to be influenced by it and is able to distinguish it.

R2 – at first she evaluates herself as useless (in the life, at a partner, at school) not nice, not sexy. During the therapy she changes her views towards a positive way, she starts to see herself as a "normal" young woman, who can be appreciated by her partner and can manage her studies even with health difficulties. She is aware of her creativity and herself i.e. charismatic authority in a role of a leader of a young people group. She is still surprised indeed – nowadays in a positive way.

R3 – from the picture of himself as a responsible and a hardworking partner slowly tends (with several episodes of the return to the original scenario) towards a picture of himself as rigidly adhering on a pattern which does not work. He works through the picture of himself as a young person who can relax, enjoys a study life with everything what it brings and does not seek support at a replacement object.

R4 – she made a change from a picture of herself as a woman who has to manage everything, to a self-image of a woman, a mother and a partner who can enjoy relax, study as a hobby and to be happy how her son grows up without any comparison of other kids and she learns to accept and give compliments. In total she "has slowed down".

R5 – a picture of herself as useless and worthy of contempt figure has shifted towards the way of a picture of self as a person, who can see its possibilities in the future, is aware of its advantages and reserves, is able to know its price.

Reflects more authentically, not so much strictly tied to evaluation of significant others.

The changes of the pictures were gradual, they happened to be in continuously in the period of a one or two year therapeutic process. At first the core work was outside the scenic-symbolic level, it was necessary for the clients to understand, inter alia, the meanings and contexts of their life lived experiences in order to understand PBSP principles and terminology. Micro-tracking was used, work with pathogenic beliefs, reversals/bookmarks, place holders (for real figures from the client's life) and objects in roles of ideal figures (most often parental – who transmit such self-guides, which are in accordance with the individual's potential), which on a symbolic level mediate the experience of adequate satisfaction of needs and therefore exactly fitting interaction.

## 6. Conclusions

The research certify that self-guides, discrepancy in self-concept, deficits in basic developmental needs and its after-effects are in interrelationships and they are significant components of construction of self-concept of an individual. Further it was explored how PBSP helps to affect domain of self-concept. Ideal figures provide experience of the adequate satisfaction of basic needs on symbolic level. The new experience is integrated as alternative records in memory as an equivalent to the real experience of the individual's personal history. It brings possibility for students to complete or correct an image of self (self-image) and develop their potential. This is opportunity for students to overcome difficulties with study which are connected with their personal history.

This article reports results of the project Specific research realized under the name “The formation of self-concept of an individual and changes of self-concept in the context of Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor of undergraduates” at the Faculty of Education at the University of Hradec Králové in 2014.

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